

What is claimed is:

1. A universal keyboard of the type comprising an alphanumeric portion having keys arranged in a plurality of substantially straight vertical columns and a plurality of substantially straight horizontal rows, including a home row, so as to define an ortholinear array, the keyboard further comprising:

left and right hand SHIFT keys, the SHIFT keys elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the SHIFT keys including a portion disposed in-line with the keys of the home row; and

a centrally disposed ENTER key, the ENTER key elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the ENTER key including a first portion disposed in-line with the keys of the home row and a second portion disposed in-line with the keys of the row below the home row.

2. The universal keyboard according to claim 1, further comprising:

a centrally disposed BACK SPACE key, the BACK SPACE key elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the BACK SPACE disposed above the ENTER key and in-line with the keys of the two rows adjacent and above the home row; and

a horizontally elongated, thumb activated SPACE BAR, disposed adjacent and below the ENTER key.

3. The universal keyboard according to claim 2, wherein the ENTER, BACK SPACE and SPACE BAR keys are vertically separated into independently activated left and right hand portions.

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4. The universal keyboard according to claim 4, further comprising:

a first functional control portion disposed in a rectangular region defining fifth and sixth key rows and located adjacent a first lateral edge of the SPACE BAR, the first functional control portion including at least a FUNCTION key for placing the keyboard into an operational mode different from a default operational mode; and

a second functional control portion disposed in a rectangular region defining fifth and sixth key rows and located adjacent a second lateral edge of the SPACE BAR, the second functional control portion including cursor control navigation arrows disposed in an inverted T configuration.

5. The universal keyboard according to claim 5, further comprising:

a full-function numeric keypad disposed within the alphanumeric portion and the second functional control portion, the numeric keypad key functions accessible by a user depressing the FUNCTION key; and

wherein a LEFT ARROW key of the navigation arrows defines a 0 key of the numeric keypad, the LEFT ARROW key being two key dimensions in width.

6. The universal keyboard according to claim 6, further comprising:

a row of function keys disposed in a row zero position, immediately above and adjacent a numeral row of the alpha portion, the function keys and the second functional control portion defining at least an editing pad; and

wherein the row zero function keys define a corresponding one of F* keys, the F* functions accessible by a user depressing the FUNCTION key.

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7. A universal keyboard of the type comprising an alphanumeric portion having keys arranged in a plurality of substantially straight vertical columns and a plurality of substantially straight horizontal rows, including a home row, so as to define an ortholinear array, the keyboard further comprising:

a first functional control portion disposed in a rectangular region defining fifth and sixth key rows and located adjacent a first lateral edge of a SPACE BAR key, the first functional control portion including at least a FUNCTION key for placing the keyboard into an operational mode different from a default operational mode;

a second functional control portion disposed in a rectangular region defining fifth and sixth key rows and located adjacent a second lateral edge of the SPACE BAR key, the second functional control portion including a set of cursor control navigation arrows disposed in an inverted T configuration; and

a full-function numeric keypad disposed within the alphanumeric portion and the second functional control portion, the numeric keypad key functions accessible by a user depressing the FUNCTION key.

8. The universal keyboard according to claim 7, further comprising:

an additional set of cursor control navigation arrows disposed adjacent the numeric keypad, the additional set of cursor control navigation arrows accessible along with the numeric keypad by a user depressing the FUNCTION key; and

a NUM LOCK key, the numeric keypad periodically accessible by a user by holding the FUNCTION key depressed, or continuously accessible by depressing the NUM LOCK key.

9. The universal keyboard according to claim 8, the numeric keypad further comprising:

numerals 1 through 9 arranged in a square 3x3 key matrix;

a numeral 00 key, positioned adjacent and below the numeral 2 key;

an oversized numeral 0 key, positioned immediately left adjacent the numeral 00 key;

arithmetic operator keys; and

independent left and right PAREN keys, the left and right PAREN keys functional when the keyboard is placed in numeric keypad mode by depressing the NUM LOCK or FUNCTION key.

10. The universal keyboard according to claim 9, the numeric keypad further comprising independent left and right TAB keys, the left and right TAB keys functional when the keyboard is placed in numeric keypad mode by depressing the NUM LOCK or FUNCTION key.

11. The universal keyboard according to claim 7, wherein depressing the FUNCTION key conditions keyboard control codes to assert a scan code for a numeric keypad key preceded by a "num lock on" code and followed by a "num lock off" code, thereby mimicking depression of a NUM LOCK key.

12. The universal keyboard according to claim 7, further comprising:

left and right hand SHIFT keys, the SHIFT keys elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the SHIFT keys including a portion disposed in-line with the keys of the home row; and

a centrally disposed ENTER key, the ENTER key elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the ENTER key including a first portion disposed in-line with the keys of the home row and a second portion disposed in-line with the keys of the row below the home row.

13. The universal keyboard according to claim 7, further comprising a functional control key for configuring the alphanumeric portion of the keyboard between QWERTY and Dvorak modes of operation.

14. The universal keyboard according to claim 12, further comprising:

a centrally disposed BACK SPACE key, the BACK SPACE key elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the BACK SPACE disposed above the ENTER key and in-line with the keys of the two rows adjacent and above the home row; and

a horizontally elongated, thumb activated SPACE BAR, disposed adjacent and below the ENTER key.

15. The universal keyboard according to claim 14, wherein the ENTER and BACK SPACE keys are located so as to be struck by an index finger when the hands are in nominal position for typing.

16. The universal keyboard according to claim 14, wherein the ENTER key is located so as to be struck by a thumb when the hands are in nominal position for typing.

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17. The universal keyboard according to claim 14, wherein the keyboard defines seven, substantially horizontal rows of keys, the SPACE BAR disposed within a next higher row from a bottom row of the keyboard, the bottom row defining user programmable keys in a region adjacent and below the SPACE BAR and between the first and second functional control portions.

18. The universal keyboard according to claim 14, wherein the keyboard defines seven, substantially horizontal rows of keys, the SPACE BAR disposed within a next higher row from a bottom row of the keyboard and extending vertically into at least a portion of the bottom row.

19. A multi-mode, universal keyboard of the type comprising an alphanumeric portion having keys arranged in a plurality of substantially straight vertical columns and a plurality of substantially straight horizontal rows, including a home row, so as to define an ortholinear array, the keyboard further comprising:

a first functional control portion disposed in a rectangular region defining fifth and sixth key rows and located adjacent a first lateral edge of a SPACE BAR key, the first functional control portion including at least a FUNCTION key for placing the keyboard into an operational mode different from a default operational mode; and

a full-function numeric keypad disposed within the alphanumeric portion and the second functional control portion, the numeric keypad key functions accessible by a user depressing the FUNCTION key.

20. The multi-mode, universal keyboard according to claim 19, further comprising a functional control key for configuring the alphanumeric portion of the keyboard between a QWERTY mode and a Dvorak mode of operation.

21. The multi-mode, universal keyboard according to claim 20, further comprising:

a row of function keys disposed in a row zero position, immediately above and adjacent a numeral row of the alpha portion, the function keys and the second functional control portion defining at least an editing pad; and

wherein the row zero function keys define a corresponding one of F* keys, the F* functions accessible by a user depressing the FUNCTION key.

22. The multi-mode, universal keyboard according to claim 21, further comprising:

a second functional control portion disposed in a rectangular region defining fifth and sixth key rows and located adjacent a second lateral edge of the SPACE BAR key, the second functional control portion including a set of cursor control navigation arrows disposed in an inverted T configuration; and

an additional set of cursor control navigation arrows disposed adjacent the numeric keypad, the additional set of cursor control navigation arrows accessible along with the numeric keypad by a user depressing the FUNCTION key; and

a NUM LOCK key, the numeric keypad periodically accessible by a user by holding the FUNCTION key depressed, or continuously accessible by depressing the NUM LOCK key.

23. The multi-mode, universal keyboard according to claim 22 the numeric keypad further comprising:

numerals 1 through 9 arranged in a square 3x3 key matrix;

a numeral 00 key, positioned adjacent and below the numeral 2 key;

an oversized numeral 0 key, positioned immediately left adjacent the numeral 00 key;

arithmetic operator keys; and

independent left and right PAREN keys, the left and right PAREN keys functional when the keyboard is placed in numeric keypad mode by depressing the NUM LOCK or FUNCTION key.

24. The multi-mode, universal keyboard according to claim 21, further comprising:

a centrally disposed ENTER key, the ENTER key elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the ENTER key including a first portion disposed in-line with the keys of the home row and a second portion disposed in-line with the keys of the row below the home row; and

a centrally disposed BACK SPACE key, the BACK SPACE key elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the BACK SPACE disposed above the ENTER key and in-line with the keys of the two rows adjacent and above the home row.

25. A multi-mode, universal keyboard of the type comprising an alphanumeric portion having keys arranged in a plurality of substantially straight vertical columns and a plurality of

substantially straight horizontal rows, including a home row, so as to define an ortholinear array, the keyboard further comprising:

a QWERTY operational mode;

a Dvorak operational mode; and

a numeric keypad/function operational mode; and

wherein each operational mode is key selectable such that particular ones of the keys of the keyboard are functional in accordance with three operational modes.

26. The multi-mode, universal keyboard according to claim 25, further comprising:

a centrally disposed ENTER key, the ENTER key elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the ENTER key including a first portion disposed in-line with the keys of the home row and a second portion disposed in-line with the keys of the row below the home row; and

a centrally disposed BACK SPACE key, the BACK SPACE key elongated vertically and oriented substantially parallel to the substantially straight vertical rows, the BACK SPACE disposed above the ENTER key and in-line with the keys of the two rows adjacent and above the home row.

27. The multi-mode, universal keyboard according to claim 25, wherein the numeric keypad/function operational mode is implemented by a numeric keypad, and wherein the numeric keypad is defined by keys comprising the four right-hand most columns of the keyboard.